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CIA and Cuba

An intelligence agency may be operating at the most successful level when nobody on the outside has any idea of what it is doing and what it knows. The very basis of effective intelligence is the idea of finding out the enemies' secrets while giving no hint of what we are doing.

It is impossible for any ordinary citizen to make a fully sound evaluation of the effectiveness of American Central Intelligence Agency. But, unfortunately, there have been several instances lately which have forced upon ordinary citizens realization of the CIA's ineffectiveness.

Most recent of these was the Cuban debacle. It was clearly a CIA show. The abortive invasion was conducted with full CIA knowledge and direction. Even the best-planned military operations may fail, but there are strong indications that the CIA simply didn't know what it was up against in Cuba and based its hopes on false premises—which is about as bad a thing as an intelligence agency can do.

Those who have been in positions enabling them to know something of the planning of the Cuban invasion by anti-Castro forces report a number of significant points about the operation.

For one thing, they say not a single invader ever had arms with live ammunition in his hands while he was on American soil. Many Cubans were recruited in the Miami area, but were not given arms and live ammunition in this country. They were trained in Guatemala, and later in Nicaragua, two Central American countries which have had experiences with Communism that make them very anti-Red, very anti-Castro, and ready to do something about it.

Some have charged the invaders were ill-trained. Inside reports contradict that contention. The troops were given nine months of basic training—more than most Americans got during World War II.

When the invasion began, with troops being hauled in old military craft, two U.S. destroyers reportedly went along as observers, one steaming 20 miles to the port of the invading force, the other 20 miles to the starboard of it—neither firing a shot nor entering Cuban territorial waters.

The invasion originally had been

planned for the late days of the Eisenhower Administration, but was not ready. It was carried out with full knowledge of the Kennedy Administration at the time it was because of fears that Red arms supplies for Castro were growing too great to permit delay.

The strategy called for establishment of a 10-mile-square beachhead protected by tanks. A government of free Cuba was to be established there, gaining early recognition from the United States and other anti-Red nations, which would send supplies for military operations which it was hoped an uprising of the Cuban people against Castro would make unnecessary.

There were some major setbacks. Some 175 invading paratroopers dropped ahead of the forces on the beach ran into heavy Castro fire and fell back in such disorder that successful landing forces were panicked and retreated in disorganization. A ship bearing tanks and ammunition was sunk. This was serious military reversal. Another serious reversal was the failure of the Cuban people to rise in revolt against Castro. The chief reason was that Castro made some 50,000 arrests—about 14,000 of them in Havana. With the key anti-Castro people out of circulation, no internal revolution developed. The CIA apparently miscalculated badly on this. It had not known that Castro in two years had been able to cover his opponents so well. Hitler had developed intimate knowledge and control of his opponents in Nazi Germany. But it took time and great organizational effort. Castro's control was not thought to be so great as it turned out to be.

It is impossible for the CIA to operate effectively in the open. Clearly, it has not been as effective as it ought to be. Some reorganization undoubtedly lies ahead. Perhaps there should be provision made for a very tightly secret joint Senate-House committee to supervise its activities, as was the case of the atomic bomb development program. That might provide a means of keeping a more careful eye on the CIA so it may be made more effective and so its shortcomings may be discovered and rectified before they show up in a failure like that in Cuba.